



Juan Judy Sally
Anita Banana
Teresa Alvarez
at Julia Pérez

NAMES / Nombres

JULIA ALVAREZ

Portrait of Virginia, 1929. Frida Kahlo. Fundacion Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico. ©ARS, NY.

When we arrived in New York City, our names changed almost immediately. At Immigration, the officer asked my father, *Mister Elbures*, if he had anything to declare. My father shook his head, “No,” and we were waved through. I was too afraid we wouldn’t be let in if I corrected the man’s pronunciation, but I said our name to myself, opening my mouth wide for the organ blast of the *a*, trilling my tongue for the drumroll of the *r*, *All-vah-rrr-es!* How could anyone get *Elbures* out of that orchestra of sound?

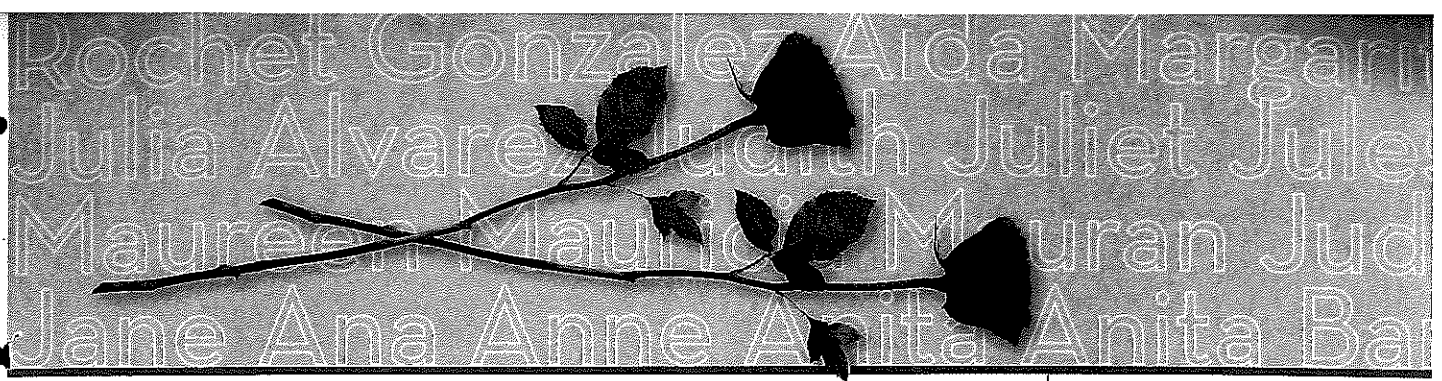
At the hotel my mother was *Missus Alburest*, and I was *little girl*, as in, “Hey, little girl, stop riding the elevator up and down. It’s *not* a toy!”

When we moved into our new apartment building, the super called my father *Mister Alberase*, and the neighbors who became mother’s friends pronounced her name *Jew-lee-ah* instead of *Hoo-lee-ah*. I, her namesake, was known as *Hoo-lee-tah* at home. But at school, I was *Judy* or *Judith*, and once an English teacher mistook me for *Juliet*.

It took awhile to get used to my new names. I wondered if I shouldn’t correct my teachers and new friends. But my mother argued that it didn’t matter. “You know what your friend Shakespeare said, ‘A rose by any other name would

Anecdote Why do you think Alvarez begins with an anecdote?

Analyze Theme At this point, how does Alvarez feel about the name she is called by at home? How does she feel about her “new” names?



smell as sweet.'"¹ My family had gotten into the habit of calling any literary figure "my friend" because I had begun to write poems and stories in English class.

By the time I was in high school, I was a popular kid, and it showed in my name. Friends called me *Jules* or *Hey Jude*, and once a group of troublemaking friends my mother forbid me to hang out with called me *Alcatraz*.² I was *Hoo-lee-fah* only to Mami and Papi and uncles and aunts who came over to eat *sancocho*³ on Sunday afternoons—old world folk whom I just as soon would go back to where they came from and leave me to pursue whatever mischief I wanted to in America. **JUDY ALCATRAZ:** the name on the Wanted Poster would read. Who would ever trace her to me?

My older sister had the hardest time getting an American name for herself because Mauricia did not translate into English. **Ironically**, although she had the most foreign-sounding name, she and I were the Americans in the family. We had been born in New York City when our parents had first tried immigration and then gone back "home," too homesick to stay. My mother often told the story of how she had almost changed my sister's name in the hospital.

After the delivery, Mami and some other new mothers were cooing over their new baby sons and daughters and exchanging names and weights and delivery stories. My

1 This line is from William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*.

2 **Alcatraz** is an island in San Francisco Bay that once was the home of a very tough federal prison.

3 **Sancocho** (sän kō' chō) is a meat stew.

Vocabulary

ironically (ī ron' i klē) *adv.* in a way that is different from what would be expected

BQ BIG Question

How has Alvarez's attitude toward her names shifted? Who has a large influence on Alvarez at this point in her life?

mother was embarrassed among the Sallys and Janes and Georges and Johns to reveal the rich, noisy name of *Mauricia*, so when her turn came to brag, she gave her baby's name as *Maureen*.

"Why'd ya give her an Irish name with so many pretty Spanish names to choose from?" one of the women asked her.

My mother blushed and admitted her baby's real name to the group. Her mother-in-law had recently died, she apologized, and her husband had insisted that the first daughter be named after his mother, *Mauran*. My mother thought it the ugliest name she had ever heard, and she talked my father into what she believed was an improvement, a combination of *Mauran* and her own mother's name *Felicia*.

"Her name is *Mao-ree-chee-ah*," my mother said to the group.

"Why that's a beautiful name," the new mothers cried. "*Moor-ee-sha, Moor-ee-sha*," they cooed into the pink blanket.

Moor-ee-sha it was when we returned to the States eleven years later. Sometimes, American tongues found even that mispronunciation tough to say and called her *Maria* or *Marsha* or *Maudy* from her nickname *Maury*. I pitied her. What an awful name to have to transport across borders!

My little sister, Ana, had the easiest time of all. She was plain *Anne*—that is, only her name was plain, for she turned out to be the pale, blond "American beauty" in the family. The only Hispanic-seeming thing about her was the affectionate nickname her boyfriends sometimes gave her, *Anita*, or as one goofy guy used to sing to her to the tune of the Chiquita Banana advertisement, *Anita Banana*.

Later, during her college years in the late '60s, there was a push to pronounce Third World⁴ names correctly. I remember calling her long distance at her group house and a roommate answering.

"Can I speak to Ana?" I asked, pronouncing her name the American way.

"Ana?" The man's voice hesitated. "Oh! you mean *Ah-nah!*"

⁴ *Third World* refers to poorer, less developed countries, mainly in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Anecdote What does this anecdote reveal about Alvarez's mother and her experience of living in a new country?

BQ BIG Question

What influenced Alvarez to pronounce the name "Ana" in the American way?



The Musicians, 1979. Fernando Botero. Oil on canvas, 85 3/4 x 74 3/4 in. Private Collection.

View the Art How does this painting add to your understanding of the story?

Our first few years in the States, though, ethnicity⁵ was not yet “in.” Those were the blond, blue-eyed, bobby socks years of junior high and high school before the ‘60s ushered in peasant blouses, hoop earrings, **serapes**. My initial desire to be known by my correct Dominican name faded. I just wanted to be Judy and **merge** with the Sallys and Janes in my class. But **inevitably**, my accent and coloring gave me away. “So where are you from, Judy?”

“New York,” I told my classmates. After all, I had been born blocks away at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

“I mean, *originally*.”

“From the Caribbean,” I answered vaguely, for if I **specified**, no one was quite sure what continent our island was on.

⁵ **Ethnicity** is a word for certain things that a group of people shares, such as language, culture, history, race, and national origin. U.S. citizens come from many different ethnic backgrounds.

Vocabulary

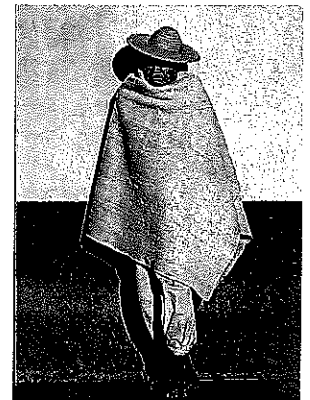
merge (mɜrj) *v.* to join together so as to become one; unite

inevitably (i nev'ə tə blē) *adv.* in a way that cannot be avoided or prevented

specified (spes'ə fid') *v.* explained or described in detail

Visual Vocabulary

A **serape** (sə ra'pā) is a blanketlike outer garment similar to a shawl. It is often woven with bright colors and patterns and is worn chiefly by men in Latin American countries.



"Really? I've been to Bermuda. We went last April for spring vacation. I got the worst sunburn! So, are you from Portoriko?"⁶

"No," I shook my head. "From the Dominican Republic."

"Where's that?"

"South of Bermuda."

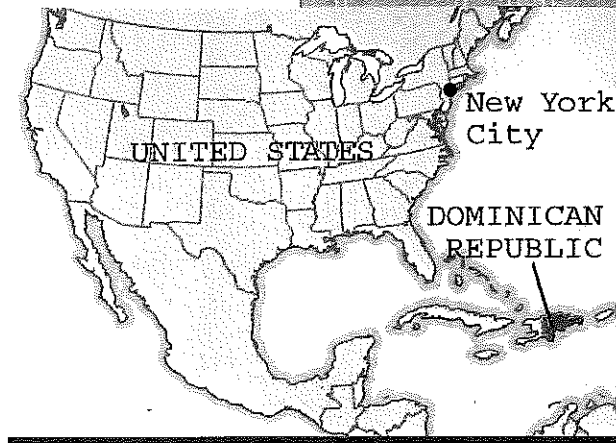
They were just being curious, I knew, but I burned with shame whenever they singled me out as a "foreigner," a rare, exotic friend.

"Say your name in Spanish, oh please say it!" I had made mouths drop one day by rattling off my full name, which according to Dominican custom, included my middle names, mother's and father's surnames for four generations back.

"Julia Altagracia Maria Teresa Alvarez Tavares Perello Espaillat Julia Pérez Rochet González," I pronounced it slowly, a name as chaotic with sounds as a Middle Eastern bazaar or market day in a South American village.

I suffered most whenever my extended family attended school occasions. For my graduation, they all came, the whole noisy, foreign-looking lot of old, fat aunts in their dark mourning dresses and hair nets, uncles with full, droopy mustaches and baby-blue or salmon-colored suits and white pointy shoes and fedora⁷ hats, the many little cousins who snuck in without tickets. They sat in the first row in order to better understand the Americans' fast-spoken English. But how could they listen when they were constantly speaking among themselves in florid-sounding phrases, rococo⁸ consonants, rich, rhyming vowels. Their loud voices carried . . .

How could I introduce them to my friends? These relatives had such complicated names and there were so



Analyze Theme Think about the Dominican custom of naming. How does it suggest the importance of family?

Anecdote What reservations does Alvarez express about introducing her relatives to friends?

⁶ *Bermuda* is an island group in the Atlantic Ocean, east of the United States. When Alvarez's classmates say *Portoriko*, they mean Puerto Rico.

⁷ A *fedora* is a soft felt hat with a curved brim and a crease along the top.

⁸ *Florid* and *rococo* both mean "very showy, highly decorated, or flowery."

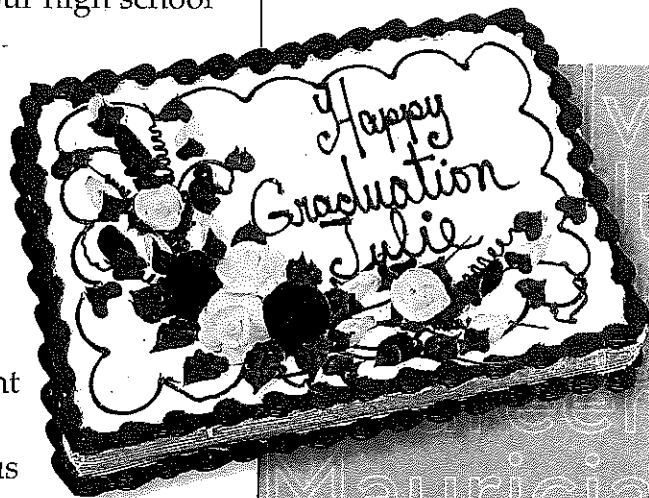
many of them, and their relationships to myself were so convoluted. There was my Tía Josefina, who was not really an aunt but a much older cousin. And her daughter, Aída Margarita, who was adopted, *una hija de crianza*. My uncle of affection, Tío José, brought my *madrina* Tía Amelia and her *comadre* Tía Pilar.⁹ My friends rarely had more than their nuclear family¹⁰ to introduce.

After the commencement¹¹ ceremony my family waited outside in the parking lot while my friends and I signed yearbooks with nicknames which recalled our high school good times: “Beans” and “Pepperoni” and “Alcatraz.” We hugged and cried and promised to keep in touch.

Our good-byes went on too long. I heard my father’s voice calling out across the parking lot, “*Hoo-lee-tah! Vámonos!*”¹²

Back home, my *tíos* and *tías* and *primas*, Mami and Papi, and *mis hermanas* had a party for me with *sancocho* and a storebought *puddín*,¹³ inscribed with *Happy Graduation, Julie*. There were many gifts—that was a plus to a large family! I got several wallets and a suitcase with my initials and a graduation charm from my godmother and money from my uncles. The biggest gift was a portable typewriter from my parents for writing my stories and poems.

Someday, the family predicted, my name would be well-known throughout the United States. I laughed to myself, wondering which one I would go by.



Mauricia
Judy Jud

Analyze Theme Reread Alvarez’s final comment. What is she suggesting about personal identity?

9 Something that is **convoluted** is twisted, coiled, and wound around. The rest of the paragraph identifies some of Alvarez’s convoluted family relationships. *Tía* (tē’ə) and *Tío* (tē’ō) mean “Aunt” and “Uncle.” *Una hija de crianza* (ōō’ nā ē’ hā dā krē ān’ zā) is an adopted daughter. *Madrina* (mā drē’ nā) and *comadre* (kō mā’ drā) both mean “godmother.” Later, Alvarez mentions *primas* (prē’ mās) and *hermanas* (ār mian’ əs), her female cousins and sisters.

10 Parents and their children make up what is called a **nuclear family**. An extended family includes other close relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

11 A **commencement** is a graduation ceremony.

12 “*Vámonos!*” (vā’ mē nōs) means “Let’s go!”

13 A *puddín* (pōō dēn’) is a pudding.